

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2937

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR TS
SUBJ: EMBASSY COMMENTS ON VISIT OF AMERICAN SPECIALIST
ABDELAZIZ SAID (AMERICAN UNIVERSITY)H

1. ICA TUNIS WILL REPORT SEPARATELY ON FULL ASPECTS OF
PROFESSOR SAID'S STAY IN TUNISIA, BUT EMBASSY WISHES TO
COVER INDEPENDENTLY MEETING HE HAD WITH DESTOURIAN
SOCIALIST PARTY DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH. SAYAH, WHO KNEW
OF SAID'S REPUTATION AS AN EXPERT ON ARAB AFFAIRS,
CO-HOSTED (ALONG WITH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBER ABCELAZIZ
AYADHI) LUNCHEON IN PROFESSOR'S HONOR APRIL 15. GUESTS
INCLUDED SAYAH'S CHIEF DE CABINET REJEB HAJI, DEPUTY PARTY CHIEF
ABDEL KADER MEHIRI(ALSO A NOTED TUNISIAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR),
AS WELL AS ICA CULTURAL AFFAIRS OFFICER AND EMBASSY POLITICAL
OFFICER.

2. CONVERSATION COVERED WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS BUT MOST
SIGNIFICANT WAS TUNISIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS. SAYAH
COMMENTED THAT HE HOPED TO VISIT U.S. IN FALL TO CORRECT
SOME OF THE MISCONCEPTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN SPREAD REGARDING
JANUARY DISTURBANCES. HE REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO RECENT
MESTIRI VISIT. SAID RESPONDED THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN
INVOLVED IN MESTITI VISIT, BUT THAT HE WOULD BE PLEASED
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TO AID SAYAH IN SETTING UP SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS.

3. SAYAH THEN TOOK OPPORTUNITY TO PRRSENT HIS INTER-
PRETATION OF JAN 26 AND EVENTS PRECEDING UGTT-GOT CLASH.
DESCRIPTION CLOSELY FOLLOWED THAT PRESENTED IN PSD WHITE
PAPER (SEE TUNIS 100) WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS GIVEN

TO CHARGE THAT ACHOUR AND SUPPORTERS HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN PLOT AGAINST STATE. HE ALSO NOTED THAT GOT HAD EVIDENCE OF DIRECT LIBYAN CONNECTION IN ACHOU-MASMOUDI PLOT. BECAUSE OF BILATERAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, HOWEVER, TUNISIA HOPED IT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY TO BRING THIS OUT IN TRAIL. POLITICAL OFFICER ASKED SAYAH HOW THIS COULD BE AVOIDED IN VIEW OF PLOT ACCUSATIONS. SAYAH RESPONDED, "THIS DEPENDS SOLELY ON ACHOUR."

4. SAID REPLIED THAT HE WAS FAMILIAR WITH VIEW EXPRESSED BY SAYAH AND WITH STORY OF ARMS CACHES FOUND IN UGTT OFFICES, BUT THAT EVIDENCE PRESENTED SO FAR AS TO EXISTENCE OF PLOT WAS UNCONVINCING. HE WARNED THAT IF TUNISIA CONTINUES ON PRESENT COURSE IT RISKS DAMAGING ITS DESERVEDLY GOOD REPUTATION IN U.S. AND ESPECIALLY IN INFLUENTIAL ACADEMIC CIRCLES. HE SPOKE OF OVERREACTING AND URGED CAUTION AND REFLECTION.

5. COMMENT: SAYAH APPEARED SOMEWHAT SURPRISED AT SAID'S REMARKS AND DID NOT RESPOND. MEETING WAS USEFUL, HOWEVER, AS IT PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY FOR PROFESSOR SAID TO EXPRESS VIEWS OBVIOUSLY HELD BY NUMBER OF OBSERVERS IN ACADEMIC AND INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES IN U.S. AS SAID IS RECOGNIZED AS A "FRIEND OF TUNISIA" IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HIS OBSERVATIONS STRUCH HOME. WE HAVE IMPRESSION THAT MANY CRITICS OF GOVERNMENTS RECENT DOMESTIC POLICIES HAVE BEEN PAINTED IN COMMUNIST, CONFIDENTIAL

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LEFTIST OR OTHERWISE UNATTRACTIVE COLLORS, AND SAYAH IS AWARE THESE ADJECTIVES CERTAINLY DO NOT APPLY TO PROFESSOR SAID. MULCAHY

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